

NMCI is a Critical Vulnerability to the USMC

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The Garrison Network, a lost training tool

It is in the mid-afternoon when a Battalion Commander is busy looking over his emails while preparing for a work-up, suddenly his computer stops. Immediately he would dial his Battalion S6, "Comm. O, get your butt up to my office right now and fix this door stop sitting on my desk!" Not to long ago, the Communications Officer and his Marines had complete administrative control over the Battalion's computers and network. The data section was able to react immediately in support of the Commander. This provided the Commander with a Marine that has an invested interest working on correcting the problem or managing his network assets. Unfortunately, this no longer applies to the garrison network, or to the computers that ride across it. Communicators must analyze the current situation in the Marine Corps, as well as in the world. The United States is fully engaged in a global war on terrorism. Marine communicators must realize that their mission could change quickly. If skill sets are lost, they can become a liability that can affect our warfighters, and their ability to protect our nation. The Navy Marine Corps Intranet (NAVY MARINE CORPS INTRANET) has created a potential loss of an invaluable skill set that can critically affect the Marine Corps within the next four years.

Background

The Navy Marine Corps Intranet (intranet is an internal network for private use) was established to help the Navy and Marine Corps to meet the following objectives:

- Enhanced Network Security
- Interoperability with CINCs (Commander in Chief) and other Services
- Knowledge sharing across the globe
- Increased productivity
- Improved systems reliability and quality of service
- Reduced cost of voice, video, and data services¹

The Navy Marine Corps Intranet was an answer to the Navy's interoperability problems across the service and globe. The Navy was not successful in standardizing the computer architecture and network throughout the Department of the Navy. Instead each unit had basically created its own local area network (LAN) that did not support interoperability. These networks did not provide the ability to share pertinent information with other units, including their higher headquarters.

Historically, Navy ship captains have been given great latitude in decision-making because they could not communicate in anything approaching real time when faced with a crisis, said Capt. Jim Newman, director of the operations division for the Chief of Naval Operations staff.²

Before the Navy Marine Corps Intranet, the Marines provided a superior garrison network; in fact, sister service communicators expressed envy at the efficiency of the Marine Corps network.³

Navy Marine Corps Intranet Services

Electronic Data Systems Corporation (EDS), which is the company that runs the Navy Marine Corps Intranet has assumed complete control over all Marine Corps garrison communications. This includes all end-user hardware like desktops, workstations, and printers, all of which now the units must be leased back from Navy Marine Corps Intranet. These are the same computers Marines deploying, will take into combat. During deployments, Marine communicators are then tasked with the responsibility of maintaining and programming of these computers, as required. The Navy Marine Corps Intranet also owns and maintains the network infrastructure which brings the Marines their services. This includes the switches, the routers, and cables leading from building to building, as well as base to base. Navy Marine Corps Intranet also controls and monitors the software that is loaded on each workstation. Lastly, the Navy Marine Corps Intranet runs all administrative services which include the help-desk, and network operators.

The Dilemma

Pre-Navy Marine Corps Intranet, Marine Corps communicators ran and owned the garrison network. Therefore, the communicators remained proficient in this invaluable skill set. Each day the Marine Corps becomes more and more reliant upon the network (email, shared documents, software programs, and internet).

Marine Corps operations throughout the past year have highlighted the versatility and expeditionary nature of our forces. Today, nearly two-thirds of our Command, Control, Communications, and Computers (C4) assets are deployed in support of ongoing operations. C4 is crucial to the success of Naval Forces in the 21st century⁴.

The Navy Marine Corps Intranet claims that the program has freed Marines (communicators) to focus on the tactical mission.

Majority of the Corps communicators are focused solely on the tactical network and communication assets. The problem is that the Marine Communicators must also remain proficient in the garrison architecture in the event that they are called to once again take over the network. The current Navy Marine Corps Intranet program is costing an estimated 6.9 billion to Navy Marine Corps Intranet over an 8 year period.⁵ Due to the current operating budget for the Marine Corps in its war on terrorism, the program could easily be dissolved to free funds for equipment or training of the Warfighter.

The role of a Marine communicator is to provide a reliable and robust communication network to the Commander and all supporting agencies in order to fulfill the assigned mission. Marine communicators understand the concept because they deploy the tactical network daily while in combat. Yet, to initiate a garrison network with commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) equipment, would be difficult and painful for all parties (communicators and warfighters). The tactical network does not evolve as quickly, nor as proficiently as the commercial garrison network.

Through a small survey, a sample of Marine Communicators were asked the question "Under Navy Marine Corps Intranet's current contract, will you and your Communication Marines remain proficient on the garrison network?" Several answered, "NO". While others clearly pointed out that they are working to keep both themselves and their Marines proficient. One Marine Corps Officer stated "Training and education of Marines has nothing to do with Navy Marine Corps Intranet. Unit Commanders and IT (Information Technology) Officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers are the ones responsible⁶." This statement alone is the reason for this paper.

A Closer Look

As stated, Marine Corps Leaders are responsible for the training of our Marines. Many Marine Communicators have confused the onset of Navy Marine Corps Intranet as the relief

from the mission of running and maintaining the garrison network. The Marine Corps prides itself on preparing for all possible scenarios by evaluating a threat, working a course of action, and then training for a solution. The same mindset must be taken when approaching the ever changing and updating garrison network.

A Scheme of Maneuver

Just like any mission, there are several possible course of action that can be used to reach the desired endstate. One such course action is that each base must establish a garrison network in a lab environment. This will facilitate the communicators learning the commercial equipment, as well as commercial programs and procedures, including planning, installation, operating, and maintaining of the network. This lab must be focused for all levels and ranks of Marine Corps Communicators. By centralizing the training, the Marine Corps can focus assets in a controlled and monitored program that can be standardized across the Marine Corps.

Conclusion

Marine Communicators are not relieved of the mission of providing garrison communications. All communicators should look for every available opportunity to train their young Marines on the latest and greatest commercial technology that is driving the commercial world. Communicators should approach

this subject as part of the professional military education. This will also allow the Marine Communicators to take this valuable information and apply it to the tactical network. Even if Headquarters Marine Corps does not establish training facilities, Commanders must let their Marines train off-site. Commands and units must invest in COTS equipment to train their Marines, as well as develop more efficient tactical networks. Commanders today have become accustomed to high quality network services and should demand that same quality from their own communicators by setting them up for success in completing that mission. Marines must still remain proficient. This means that leaders will have to invest time and money in training of all ranks within the communications field. Certain units have established their own closed local-area networks which are providing their Marine Communicators with priceless training. Yet, in the operating forces, most units do not have the time, money, and resources to provide the same training for their Marines. Young Marines are resourceful and thrive for a challenge; therefore, leaders must make every effort to provide that challenge to those Marines.

¹ Navy Marine Corps Intranet-ISF

² Washington Technology

³ Interview with Captain Noah Slemp

⁴ Brigadier General John R. Thomas in front of the House Armed Services Committee

⁵ Government Accounting Office, Washington DC

⁶ Interview with Captain Chris Beckford

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Additional Information was obtained through interviews with

GS-14 Steve Page who is a Lead Engineer for the MCNOSC.

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Major Brian H. Conrad who is the Commanding Officer for 3rd Marine Division, Communications Company.

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